

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

1. (Previously Presented) A process for the separation of nickel, cobalt or both from impurity elements selected from one or more of calcium, magnesium, manganese and chloride contained in a leach solution, the process comprising the step of subjecting the leach solution to solvent extraction using a carboxylic acid, an aliphatic hydroxyoxime and a kinetic accelerator.
2. (Original) The process of claim 1, wherein the solvent extraction step comprises contacting the leach solution with an organic solution comprising the carboxylic acid, hydroxyoxime and kinetic accelerator.
3. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 2, wherein cobalt poisoning as a result of oxidation of cobalt(II) to cobalt(III) is avoided.
4. (Currently Amended) The process of claim 2 or ~~claim 3~~, wherein all of an organic phase separated from the solvent extraction step is subjected to stripping with an acid solution to strip metals present from the organic phase.
5. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 4, wherein the stripping step is preceded by a scrubbing step.
6. (Currently Amended) The process of claim 4 ~~or 6~~, wherein the stripping step is a selective stripping step.
7. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 2 to 6~~ claim 2, wherein the organic solution displays fast extraction kinetics for nickel, cobalt, copper, zinc and manganese.

8. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 2 to 7~~ claim 2, wherein the organic solution is in contact with the leach solution for a period of 5 minutes or less.
9. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 8 wherein the organic solution is in contact with the leach solution for a period of 3 minutes or less.
10. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 8 wherein the organic solution is in contact with the leach solution for a period of 2 minutes or less.
11. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 2 to 10~~ claim 2, wherein the organic solution comprises a stabilizer against hydroxyoxime degradation.
12. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 11, wherein the stabilizer reduces oxidation and/or hydrolysis of the hydroxyoxime.
13. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 12, wherein the stabilizer is an anti-oxidant.
14. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 1 to 13~~ claim 1, wherein the solvent extraction step effects extraction of a large proportion of the nickel, cobalt, copper and zinc into an organic phase, to the extent that these elements are present, with a large proportion of the calcium, magnesium, manganese and chloride being rejected to the aqueous phase.
15. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 1 to 14~~ claim 1, wherein the leach solution contains impurity elements selected from one or more of calcium, magnesium, manganese and chloride, optionally together with copper and/or zinc.
16. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 1 to 15~~ claim 1, wherein the leach solution is a solution that has been subjected to a preliminary iron and/or aluminium precipitation step to precipitate out iron and/or aluminium to leave an aqueous leach solution containing the target elements and impurity elements other than iron and aluminium.

17. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 1 to 16~~ claim 1, wherein the carboxylic acid is 2-methyl, 2-ethyl heptanoic acid or a cationic exchange extractant having extraction characteristics similar to 2-methyl, 2-ethyl heptanoic acid.
18. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 1 to 17~~ claim 1, wherein the hydroxyoxime is a chelating α -hydroxyoxime.
19. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 1 to 18~~ claim 1, wherein the kinetic accelerator increases the rate of extraction and/or stripping kinetics of nickel.
20. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 1 to 19~~ claim 1, wherein and the pH of the aqueous phase in the solvent extraction step is maintained in the range of from 5.0 to 6.5 to effect extraction of the cobalt and/or nickel into the organic phase.
21. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 20, wherein the pH of the aqueous phase in the solvent extraction step is maintained in the range of from 5.5 to 6.0.
22. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 21, wherein the organic phase from the solvent extraction step is subjected to scrubbing.
23. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 1 to 22~~ claim 1, wherein cobalt and nickel are extracted into the organic phase, and the organic phase is subjected to selective stripping to separate to a significant extent the cobalt from the nickel.
24. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 23, wherein the selective stripping comprises contacting the organic phase from the solvent extraction with an acidic aqueous solution to yield (a) a loaded strip liquor containing cobalt, and (b) a selectively stripped organic solution containing nickel.
25. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 24, wherein the acidic aqueous solution used in the selective stripping has a pH in the range of 3.0 to 4.0.

26. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 23 to 25~~ claim 23, wherein the cobalt is recovered from the loaded strip liquor.

27. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 26, wherein the cobalt is recovered by cobalt precipitation.

28. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 23 to 27~~ claim 23, wherein the nickel is recovered from the stripped organic solution from the selective stripping step.

29. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 28, wherein the organic solution from the selective stripping step contains nickel and copper, and is subjected to stripping with an aqueous acid solution to separate the nickel into the aqueous phase with only a small amount of the copper, followed by ion exchange to remove the copper, and the nickel is recovered from an eluate of the ion exchange.

30. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 22, wherein the scrubbed organic solution is stripped to obtain (a) a loaded strip liquor containing nickel and cobalt, and copper and zinc to the extent that copper and zinc are present, and (b) a stripped organic solution.

31. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 30, wherein the loaded strip liquor is subjected to organophosphinic acid solvent extraction.

32. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 31, wherein the organophosphinic acid solvent extraction produces (a) a loaded organic solution which contains cobalt (and zinc and copper, to the extent they are present), and (b) an aqueous raffinate containing nickel.

33. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 32, wherein the loaded organic solution from the organophosphinic acid extraction is scrubbed, the scrubbed organic solution containing cobalt (copper and zinc) is subjected to stripping with sulphuric acid at an appropriate pH, the loaded strip liquor containing cobalt (copper and zinc) is subjected to ion exchange to

remove copper and zinc present, and cobalt recovered from the eluate.

34. (Previously Presented) The process of claim 33, wherein nickel is recovered from the aqueous raffinate from the organophosphinic acid extraction.

35. (Currently Amended) The process of ~~any one of claims 1 to 34~~ claim 1, wherein scrubbing is conducted on the organic phase after each solvent extraction.

36. (Currently Amended) A product recovered by the process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 35~~ claim 1.